

CLIFTON UPON TEME PARISH COUNCIL MEETING

4th June 2020,

Worcestershire County Council report by Ken Pollock

1. National policies

Anyone living in England is entitled to feel a little confused about the current state of play in our battle against the coronavirus. Sometimes it seems the media in general, and the BBC in particular, are more interested in scoring points against the government than in elucidating the current situation.

To take one example, the Prime Minister speaks to the whole nation of the United Kingdom. The devolved administrations have the power to modify the plans put forward by the Prime Minister. The BBC chooses to say that Boris is speaking only to and about England. This is not true, but sows confusion.

If you read the 60 page document produced last month by the government, you will see clear policies for the current situation, but you will also see that reference is made to the powers of the devolved administrations to modify the UK laws. That is their right.

Broadly speaking, the current position in England is that we should work from home, if possible, but otherwise go to work as usual, while observing social distancing. Some classes of primary schools opened this week, with others later, but some may not open until the autumn term.

The teaching unions are fearful about this, but do not seem to have learnt anything from the fact that schools have been looking after vulnerable children, and those of key workers, for 8 or 9 weeks, apparently without any problems of infection or transmission.

2. County council policies

The County Council has adopted the "work at home" policy, and is managing to conduct much of its work satisfactorily that way. Highway work continues, as with the surface dressing on the B4204 between the village and the county boundary scheduled for this week. Old Road Clifton, will be closed for about three days from the 7th July and there are plans for Pound Lane to be closed from the 20th July for S278 works. I have queried the length of time that this closure may be for.

Elsewhere, there are seven crews working on footway repairs, that number increasing to 10 by the end of this month. In this way, and in dealing with potholes and the like, our highway personnel are keeping active, despite the continued lockdown.

There have been calls for money to be spent on increasing provision for pedestrians and cyclists and this will be done in line with the policies included in LTP4, issue a few months ago. We do not see the current situation resulting in long term changes to the means of moving around the county.

Social workers need to keep in touch with children in care and those older people who need their assistance. There are 186 care homes in the county and early on they indicated they did not want to take patients from hospitals, if they might be infective with C19. As a result, the county booked 200 hotel rooms to take these patients, to ensure there would be no infection of others in care homes by these discharged patients.

It appears that other counties did not do this, and some authorities actually threatened to withhold payments to care homes, if the latter did not take these potentially dangerous patients. This county

avoided such problems, but has now stood down all the hotel rooms, except at Cadmore Lakeside, in St Michael's, Tenbury. I visited Cadmore three weeks ago, and they are content with the situation, although they could take a lot more patients in process of convalescence.

While the number of patients dying in hospitals and care homes seems to be declining, vigilance must be maintained. Meanwhile, most of our household recycling centres have re-opened, Tenbury opening for the first time three weeks ago, and Upton will open this weekend.

Garden centres may now open legally, as will be true of many shops. Small village shops have always been exempt from the general closure, and I am sure we are all grateful for the service they have provided.

Personal and business advice is still available through the County website and "Here2Help", and the Worcestershire 1000 site, run by Worcestershire Business Central. In seeking to revive the economy we are very grateful for the help of the Local Enterprise Partnership, the Chamber of Commerce, the FSB and the NFU, among others.

Agriculture has more or less always relied on seasonal labour for fruit and vegetable picking and the like. It is widely believed that supplies of overseas help have been terminated by our leaving the EU. This is not true, and various groups of workers have arrived from the east of Europe. In addition, however, the call has gone out for local people to offer to help, particularly for those displaced from their normal work.

Sometimes, this has not been successful, for a variety of reasons. Access to farms may not be easy. The work may demand long hours for little pay. It may be hard and skilful. All in all, we must hope that our essential farming community continues to serve us with excellent local produce, at a time when overseas supplies may be limited or non-existent.

While not able to meet any of you face to face, I would like to assure you that I am available through the usual channels, and can offer help in a variety of circumstances, where the county is concerned.

Again, good luck to you all!

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